

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# *Bellum Gallicum*

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Caesar's seven-book history of the events in and around Gaul between 58 and 52 BC has variously proved a stumbling block for centuries of readers. They have been unable to agree on its intent, deeming it both propagandistic and innocent; on the nature of its dissemination, deeming it to have been distributed either year by year as a Roman magistrate's (necessarily) incomplete record of his deeds, or all at once, as a finished product designed to make a particular argument; or even on its authorship. Though by now long accepted as the work of Julius Caesar – it was not always so (V. Brown 1979: 113–16) – questions remain about the integrity of its composition and about its sources. There is not even agreement about the basic characteristics of its genre. Perhaps no other ancient work has provoked such radical disagreement. Safest, perhaps, to keep the *Bellum Gallicum* in the schoolroom, where the correctness of its Latin and its exciting fighting scenes can introduce young readers to the glamor and grit that was Rome on its frontiers. In this chapter, I propose to investigate some of these trouble spots, concentrating on (1) genre, narrative voice, and style; and (2) on the *BG*'s place in the traditions of ancient military narrative.

## Form, Voice, and Style

The *BG* was read (or misread) within Caesar's lifetime as a work that might serve as the basis for more ornate histories (Cic. *Brut.* 262); the Dictator was scarcely cold before its temporal parameters were regarded as inadequate. The narrative was continued in an eighth book to what Caesar's lieutenant Hirtius regarded as the (other?) end of the Gallic war (see Cluett, chapter 14, p. 197). Its year-by-year narrative – each *volumen* corresponding to a consular year (cf. 1.6.4, 7.6.1) – invites comparison with annalistic historiography, while its style has suggested to some readers the dispatches sent to the Senate by generals in the field, especially at the

close of a campaign. The mention of such letters at strategic endpoints in the text encourages such a comparison (2.35.4, 4.38.5, 7.90.8). Inconsistencies between books may suggest not only serial composition while on campaign – an attractive idea, given the picture that others give us of a Caesar capable of writing “as the weapons were flying” (Fron. *Parth.* 9; cf. Plut. *Caes.* 17.7) – but also serial dissemination, in the manner of such dispatches (Wiseman 1998). It has been argued, too, that the *BG* was composed and disseminated in installments (books 1–2, 3–6, and 7: Radin 1918). Yet there are also clear and cogent indications that Caesar shaped these seven *commentarii* as a unit, with a tangible narrative arc and a marked beginning, complex middle, and fully closural end. Unlike the *Bellum civile*, whose book divisions are unclear and whose narrative is plainly unfinished (see Raaflaub, chapter 13, p. 181), Caesar’s books on the Gallic war, however they were written, were, I believe, finished off as a unitary narrative.

The Gallic *commentarii* were certainly available to readers by the time of the composition of Cicero’s *Brutus* in 46 BC, and probably well before (Radin 1918: 283 n. 2). They provided Livy with a model for his battle descriptions (Walsh 1961: 203; Oakley 1997: I.138–9) and have continued to influence the terms and tone of military history to the present (Keegan 1991 [1976]: 62–78). No manuscript of the *BG* written earlier than the ninth century survives, though one branch has colophons naming late-antique readers or correctors (Winterbottom 1983: 35–6).<sup>1</sup> The original title remains uncertain.

Caesar’s own *commentarii*, plus those of his continuators, amount to 14 *volumina*. They are the only surviving examples of the historiographical, or narrative, *commentarius*. In assessing the nature of the genre, therefore, scholars have traditionally turned to other types of *commentarius* (a convenient list is at Riggsby 2006: 134). It is now the *communis opinio* that these show us little of the kind of thing which we see in Caesar. Recently, however, a persuasive case has been made that the Caesarian *commentarius* is a “fairly typical” representative of a kind of writing, very variable in nature, that can broadly be described as “notes” with a simple, paratactic structure, and which might even have included direct speech as Caesar uses it, not to provide analysis – as speeches in history generally do – but as “epigrams that cap anecdotes of isolated examples of heroism or the like” (Riggsby 2006: 142; also 137–8 (parataxis), 140 (notes)). And if Riggsby is right to argue that there is no clear evidence that the Romans recognized subtypes of the *commentarius* form, then we have no real purchase on this form as a genre. This is itself an important piece of information, especially in a literary system in which generic expectations were an important constituent of meaning and interpretation. If the designation “*commentarius*” could accommodate anything from philosophical treatises to lists of rhetorical commonplaces to catalogues of stratagems, and perhaps even memoirs such as Sulla’s, then each one must have in some way set its own rules. In the period in which Caesar was writing, generic experimentation was rife; his audience would have been teased, misled, surprised, and cajoled into accepting these texts as something that shared in, but also stretched the boundaries of, the *commentarius*. Whatever the case, Cicero’s own coyness about the adornment in his own *commentarius* (*Att.* 2.1.1) shows that the pose that Cicero, Hirtius, and subsequent readers have attributed to Caesar, that

he wrote these texts to provide others with a basis from which to write a fuller, more “literary” history, is just that, a pose – not unlike the “unaccustomed as I am to public speaking” gesture that Cicero (of all people!) makes at the beginning of the *Pro Archia* (see further Raaflaub, chapter 13, pp. 179–80).

The Caesarian *commentarii de bello Gallico* do suggest parallels with other types of military report. First, the “military communiqué,” or the *litterae* that generals sent from the front. We have a few surviving examples of these in Cicero’s letters from Cilicia (*Att.* 5.20, *Fam.* 15.4; Fraenkel 1956). The short, declarative sentences and piling up of ablatives absolute, in particular – parodied as an element of a military manner (e.g. Plaut. *Pers.* 753–4) – are favorite Caesarian devices that are sometimes linked to such a chancery or administrative style (Odelman 1972: 130–4). Related are generals’ inscriptions, which liberally employ the *primus*- and *solus*-language appropriate to praise (the major ones are collected in Riggsby 2006: Appendix B). There are a number of lavish examples of these from the Republic; under the Principate, this language became an expected part of imperial discourse, as in the *Res Gestae*. Though Caesar pulls back from self-puffery, choosing instead the remarkable device of a distancing, third-person narration, he emphasizes the singularity of his achievements, minimizing the contributions of his officers but enhancing that of his army (Welch 1998). He thus combines the traditional habit in strategocentric military narrative of letting the singular subject represent the general and his troops (Keegan 1991 [1976]: 22, 24, 47) with a remarkable portrayal of the army as the strong arm of the Roman people, controlled and disciplined by the path-breaking ideal general. So 7.8.1–4:

Having made these preparations ... he set out (*proficiscitur*) for the Helvii. Though the Cevennes ... blocked the way with very deep (*altissima*) snow at this, the hardest (*durissimo*) time of the year, still, by tossing aside the snow to a depth of six feet and thereby opening up the way, by means of the greatest labor on the part of the soldiers (*summo militum labore*) he arrived (*pervenit*) at Arvernian territory. They were caught unawares, for they believed that they were protected by the Cevennes as by a defensive wall, and at that time of year the passes had never been open even to a man on his own/ an extraordinary individual (*ac ne singulari quidem umquam homini*). He ordered (*imperat*) the cavalry to wander as widely as possible and to bring as much terror as possible to the enemy (*quam latissime possint, vagentur et quam maximum hostibus terrorem inferant*).

Though the soldiers take no direct initiative in this brief passage, they are present (boldface) as the counterpart in action to his orders. His is the forward movement (underscored) and the preparation before it; his too the epiphany. That, however, is neatly shared, as in Caesar’s formulation the general is both the *singularis homo* and the one who surpasses even that alleged impossibility, by bringing his whole army with him over the mountain wall. The deadpan language will not keep readers from noting the double meaning of *singularis* (“one” or “one and only”: *OLD s.v.* 2b/4b) and the *primus* motif in *ne ... umquam*, reinforced by the superlatives *durissimo* and *altissima*. Once over the mountain, the soldiers share in the panegyric motifs, bringing the most terror possible to the widest possible area (*quam*

*latissime ... quam maximum*). As Marincola notes (1997: 212), Caesar “is surrounded by a sea of ‘*nostri*,’” a Roman convention that “fosters a sense not only of intimacy but also of common achievement.”

In this polymorphously perverse text, the authorial voice is not the least puzzling aspect. Until the late first century BC, the writing of Roman history was overwhelmingly done by those who helped make it: Fabius Pictor, Cato, Piso Frugi, Sallust. And most of these writers of *res gestae* seem to have used the first person, of themselves, at some point or other in their narrative, to describe historical actions in which they were themselves participants. Certainly none of them (as far as we can tell from the extant remains) refers to himself in the third person (Marincola 1997: 193–7). Caesar, famously, is different.

The narrator does use the first-person pronoun. Those instances of “I” or “we” are confined with one exception (I do not think that 5.13.4 is analogous) to remarks in which he speaks explicitly as the writer of the text rather than as an actor in it, i.e. in cross-references or in antiquarian or ethnographical contexts. The single exception is telling (7.25):

There was fighting everywhere ... and the enemy’s hope of victory was continually renewed ... fresh troops constantly relieved the exhausted, and they believed that the whole salvation of Gaul lay in that one moment of time. There happened, as we watched, something which seemed historically memorable and which we did not think should be passed over (*accidit inspectantibus nobis quod dignum memoria visum praetereundum non existimavimus*). Before the town gate, opposite our tower, a Gaul who was throwing into the fire lumps of pitch and tallow ... was pierced by a dart in the right side and fell dead. Stepping across him as he lay there, one of the Gauls closest by performed the same task; when that second man was killed in the same way ... a third succeeded him, and a fourth the third, nor was that position abandoned by the defenders before ... the fighting ended.

It is possible that the watching “we” (underscored) may designate the Romans; but the immediately following evaluative “we,” normally associated in this text with the narrator, suggests that here the narrator and the character-on-the-spot are, in fact, one – or at the least, are separated only by literary function. At this crisis point of the battle – a moment Tacitus might see as evocative of the good old days of Roman history (*Ann.* 4.32.1 “huge wars, sacks of cities, kings routed and captured”) – the complementary processes of witnessing (*inspectantibus*), evaluating (*dignum*), and memorializing (*memoria*) are shown at work together. In letting his mask slip, the narrator gains authority for his own autopsy and heightens the emotional punch, in good rhetorical style.

This separation of “Caesar” the actor/character from the anonymous narrator (who is known, but not declared, to be Caesar) has been read in different ways. It has been seen as an indicator of “epistemic objectivity” (Riggsby 2006: 152; the author does not share the point of view or desires of the actor). Conversely, it has been understood as a device masking the text’s partiality: the author does share these things with the actor but, by separating the two, reassures us – perhaps speciously – that the author is self-critical. Or, as a means of self-aggrandizement (akin to the

“royal we” or “one”); and, finally, as a way to give the division between author and character a meta-literary function, inviting us to question the nature of the relationship between them (Kraus 2007). The *BG*’s affinity with triumphal inscriptions suggests that self-aggrandizement is an appropriate mode for this kind of record; but its affinity with historiography and antiquarian texts may incline us to see the separated narrator as marking a scholarly, rather more distanced perspective.

One of the more interesting ways in which readers try to compensate for the absence of an explicitly identified authorial voice is to provide the *BG* with the preface it seems to lack. One way of doing that is to find in the famous opening paragraph a preface *malgré soi*: so, for example, Rüpke (1992) has detected in it kinship with the prefaces of geographical *commentarii*. That further helps the genre question, by suggesting a programmatic affiliation with an externally attested type of writing. A second option, illustrated here (figure 12.1) from an entry-level reader, tries to provide the work with the larger context it “must have had” in the historical author’s mind.

This edition of *BG* 1–29 opens with Caesar wondering how he will replenish his coffers. Gaul, he knows, is wealthy – but he does not know enough about it, so summons a native informant to tell him about the land of projected conquest. The imagined scenario is worth considering not only for its comic aspects. By putting the first sentences of *BG* 1 into a Druid’s mouth, the editor authenticates the



**Figure 12.1** *BG* 1.1.1. From *Caesaris Bellum Helveticum*, ed. K.-H. Graf von Rothenburg with illustrations by Walter Schmid (Lincolnwood, IL, 1996). Reproduced with permission of the McGraw-Hill Companies.

geographical and ethnographical expertise put so prominently on show as we open the first *commentarius*. The map completes the illusion, but also suggests the growing Roman habit of thinking with maps as the empire expands. Caesar's standard-shaped map pin solves the problem of his purpose in Gaul (see Ramsey, chapter 4, and Rosenstein, chapter 7 in this volume) and establishes him as the chief actor in this story. This has the added benefit of collapsing Caesar and "Caesar," effectively defusing the third-person problem. In a single page, the editor has naturalized – and deproblematized – this text, which then proceeds as a "typical" narrative of conquest.

When Caesarian scholars turn to his language and use of literary devices, preoccupations with genre continue. Stimulated by the suggestions of Hirtius and Cicero that these *commentarii* had all the ornament they needed, scholars have scrutinized their diction and *figurae*, discovering elements that seem to belong more to the kind of elaborated and explicitly rhetoricized narrative written by Livy or Tacitus. And there are many such elements to be found: in Caesar's hands, stylistic nudity is indeed a costume.

Though scholars have identified a distinct trend from Book 1 to Book 7 toward increasing deployment and variety of literary *ornatus*, the style of the *BG* is neither neatly plottable nor uniform. To various extents one finds throughout the seven books traits more usually associated with full-scale historiography. Among them is (1) speech, both direct and indirect, including pre-battle *hortationes*; *oratio obliqua* predominates, with *oratio recta* first occurring in Book 4. There are many (2) spectacular scenes of single combat and the *urbs capta*, together with a pronounced emphasis on fear and pity in the battle narratives; and several (3) ethnographical digressions (see Fantham, chapter 11, pp. 151–3). Other elements found in many forms of "high" historiographical narrative include (4) intertextuality. This is much understudied in Caesar, but there are prominent quotations at least from Thucydides (1.1.1 ~ Thuc. 3.92.2, Lowell Edmunds *per litteras*) and Lucretius (5.33.2 ~ *DRN* 1.43, Németh 1984). The very decision to write a seven-book third-person narrative about adventures in a foreign land must be to some extent itself an intertextual gesture, aligning Caesar's text with Xenophon's *Anabasis* and even, by extension, with Xenophon's continuation of Thucydides, the *Hellenika*. Caesar's own implicit invitation to be continued must be considered as a possible Xenophontic turn, as well (for Xenophon and Caesar see Lendon 1999: e.g. 295; Costantini 1993). Also found is (5) bilingual word play (e.g. 7.17.3 "the slender weakness of the Boioi," a Celtic word connected in antiquity with *bos*; cf. Horsfall on Verg. *Aen.* 7.740 *maliferae*). We see (6) strong structural markers such as ring composition (Torrigan 1998: 56–9) and (7) the deployment of declamatory topics, most notably in the speech of Critognatus, with which one can compare Quint. *Decl. Maior* 12, on cannibalism. Finally there is (8) the "simple" style, the art of choice and clarity: Caesar's famous *elegantia* (Hirt. *BG* 8 *Praef.* 4). It may appear to be an absence of adornment, but it is as carefully crafted as any Asiatic effusion (Cairns 1979: 5–6, 28, 34), and was recognized as such, both in the contemporary battles over appropriate language – in which Caesar was an active participant (Fantham, chapter 11, pp. 148–151) – and in laudatory evaluations of Caesar's own style

(e.g. Hirt. *BG* 8 *Praef.* 6 *emendate*). As a historiographical idiom, Caesar's language and style make a complex point about the value and use of decorum, and about the relationship of language to the events it describes.

## War Narratives

What emerged . . . was a myth – not because it was false necessarily but because it located an . . . event within routine structures of understanding.

(Biel 1996: 24)

There are many possible approaches to the *BG* as a piece of military narrative. I concentrate here on Caesar's mythmaking: the ways in which he accommodates unfamiliar, unique experience in a distant land to patterns of speech and thought already understood and accepted by a Roman audience. Such an organization of experience into familiar, schematized categories of description and explanation does not necessarily imply that a narrative is fictionalized. It is relatively clear that Caesar did not systematically alter or propagandize events; especially where it can be confirmed by archaeology (e.g. Alesia: Le Gall 1999), the hard core of his narrative – topographical details aside – seems reliable. Nor do I intend, by this approach, to understand Caesar's narrative technique as a means of tendentiously deforming events (as does Rambaud 1966), or even as a way of simplifying the strange for an audience who would have little idea about the geography of Gallia (Pelling 1981). Instead, I want to explore how Caesar's decision to reduce the potentially infinite confusion and multiplied engagements of war to a few highlighted episodes harnesses a pre-existing grammar of military narrative to create a coherent, plausible literary representation of experience. In battle narratives, in particular, this grammar and its rhetoric are "not merely a machine to convert experience into words, but the very armature upon which that experience is organized and made sense of" (London 1999: 274).

### *Hostes, milites, cives*

Conventional military narrative divides its focus between the enemy and us, even when (e.g. in civil war narratives), in Pogo's words, "he is us." Caesar had a rich tradition of Gallic ethnography available: though our best attestations of it come from later texts, the stereotype of the fierce, loud, but ultimately unenduring Gaul can be glimpsed in the fragments of Cato the Elder and Posidonius, both of whom almost certainly served as sources for Caesar (Fantham, chapter 11, p. 151). He, in turn, combined autopsy – often filtered through the tall tales of soldiers (Aili 1995; Horsfall 1999) – with literary ethnography in creating his picture of the enemy. Remarkably, however (and despite the potential for creating fear and loathing in his readers), Caesar did not pull out all the stops in creating either his Gauls or his Germans. The opposition is factious, to be sure: this is one of the typical characteristics of barbarian nations, especially of the Gauls. It is emphasized in the *BG* by the ironic repetition of

the phrase *omni Gallia pacata* (and variants), a universalizing, closural statement that never in fact seems to stay closed, thanks to the endless splitting of Gallic resistance into new combinations. There is, in fact, no “Gaul in its entirety”, much less a pacified one: the opening of *BG* 1 already encodes division, both of the people and of their description, as Caesar’s interwoven *Gallia omnis* and *est divisa* iconically demonstrates the impossibility of unification. Though the Gauls themselves deploy the *omnis/tota Gallia* rhetoric, notably when flattering the Romans (1.30.1), it is abundantly clear from the complexity of the various conflicts contained even in the brief *BG* 1 – the struggle with Orgetorix, the consequent *bellum Helvetiorum*, and the ensuing conflict with Ariovistus the German – that any hope of “ruling all Gaul” (*totius Galliae imperio potiri* 1.2.2) is as much a mirage for the Romans as it is for Orgetorix, Vercingetorix, and other chieftains. But it is also the force that drives the story: each unification leads to a further fragmentation of Gallia, which in turn requires further Roman intervention.

The seemingly endless tension between a unified Gaul and its component parts, then, becomes both a structuring and a thematic device. In other areas, too, Caesar avoids the unmotivated use of barbarian stereotypes. His northerners are not boastful, excessively ornamented, or comically oversized; the Germans at 1.39.1, “with huge-sized bodies,” also have “unbelievable courage (*virtus*).” Though the Gauls give their famous war-cry (5.37.3, 7.80.4), it is not made part of their formal ethnographic description; and both Gallic and Germanic leaders speak with near-Roman clarity and political savvy. What is more, on several occasions the enemy almost bests Caesar, who finds his army in tearful panic at the thought of the Germans (1.39), nearly routed by the Nervii (2.18–27), close to ignominious retreat from Britain (5.8–17), massacred in the forests (5.27–37), and, finally, trounced at Gergovia and surrounded at the climactic siege of Alesia (7.36–51, 81–8). Far from being all savage show and no reliable power, like the huge Gallic Goliath to Manlius’ tough little David (Claud. Quadr. 10b Peter), Caesar’s Gauls are a match even for his toughened soldiers. Most significantly, Caesar “refuses numerous self-created opportunities to draw a sharp distinction between Roman self and alien other” (Riggsby 2006: 126). Mingling criticism of Roman self with praise of the alien other, the *BG* blurs any easy categorization, suggesting that in this imperialistic text, the way is already open for assimilation of the Gallic nation to the Roman state (and Caesar would soon extend citizen status to Gallia Cisalpina).

When it comes to “us” (*nos* and *nostrum*) in ancient military narrative, the higher up the pecking order, the more text-time one gets. So the general, *ipse*, is the subject of most of the third-person verbs, acting representatively for the whole community of soldiers. Legates and – especially in Caesar – centurions are named, and occasionally given snippets of speech or writing; the Tenth Legion, Caesar’s most trusted (1.42.5), is once or twice allowed a voice, even to make a joke (1.42.6); the mass of soldiers, unindividuated, supplies the big picture action (e.g. 2.27.1 “our men . . . renewed the battle”; 3.6.2 “the Romans drove the terrified remainder into flight”) and crowd noises (1.39.4 “hidden away in their tents . . . they bemoaned their fate; 5.32.1 “from the nighttime brouhaha the enemy perceived their departure”).



Though this literary arrangement misrepresents the very restricted perceptions available to any given actor in the mêlée of war and distorts the relative importance on the field of these various groups, it economically maintains a close, heroizing focus on the “best of the Romans.” This in turn fits the Roman conception of significant historical action as exemplary deeds done by men who are *spectatissimi*, both “most visible” and “most viewed.”

If the Gauls are presented as fickle and mobile, the Romans in *BG* are ordered and – even more important – capable of being restored to order if need be. Individuals are clearly separated into wrong (Sabinus, the over-trusting legate who leads his troops into disaster in Book 5; Welch 1998: 95–6) and right (Labienus, a tactful treatment throughout), easily frightened (Considius, despite his experience, at 1.21–2) and brave (only centurions and junior officers; Welch 1998: 89). The degree of Caesar’s literary shaping can be judged not only by his schematization of character but by his selectivity in narrating events: he presents with concision a limited number of type scenes (e.g., battles, council scenes, river crossings, sieges: see further below) in which individuals are singled out only rarely.

Because he restricts the number of his building blocks, Caesar can make textual links correspondingly more clear by emphasis and careful deployment. Selectively elaborated scenes not only draw attention to themselves but respond one to the other across books, constructing a large-scale architecture and inviting readerly comparison and judgment (both *desiderata* of history: Cic. *De or.* 2.63). Roman actors play an important role in this elaboration. So, for instance, two good centurions fight an exemplary double combat against long odds, saving each other’s lives in the process (5.44). They are put in counterpoise with two disobedient centurions – one of whom manages to compensate for the foolishness of both, again, by saving Roman *milites* with his life (7.50). Pullo and Vorenus (Book 5) serve as contrast and as model for Fabius and Petronius, in a complex structure that challenges our first impression of these scenes as episodic, self-contained vignettes.

The last Roman character in the *BG* is the *populus Romanus* (see also Cluett, chapter 14, pp. 202, 204), effectively the group whose preconceptions and expectations serve as the ideal receivers of this text. Caesar orients us to the campaigns in Gaul via a mention of what the Gauls are called in “our” language, and contrasts the far-off Belgae with the *cultus atque humanitas* of the Provincia (~ modern Provence; cf. 1.1.3 with 1.2.4, the Helvetii divided from *provincia nostra*). Linguistic, geographic, and cultural differences are established (Schadee 2008b: 159–60). Those distinctions between Romans and barbarians begin to blur, however, when Gallic “friends of the Roman people” are introduced (1.3.4). Caesar is playing a complicated game involving physical, mental, and cultural distance. These foreigners have a past with Rome, a past that has the effect of collapsing the differences between them. Henceforth, numerous possible configurations arise: hostile Gauls and Germans may be *amici populi Romani* (cf. Ariovistus at 1.43.4); allied Gauls may (and do) revolt. And indeed, the future for most of these Gauls – those who are not massacred, that is – is to become part of Rome, even, eventually, Roman citizens (Riggsby 2006: 126–32; see also above, p. 166).

Negotiating these complexities is “Caesar” as the representative of the Roman people, a relationship neatly set up in the *BG*’s first narrated conflict. Bracketing his initial encounter with the Helvetii, Caesar evokes the memory of earlier strife between this nation and the Romans. At the start he refuses their petition: “because he remembered (*memoria tenebat*) that the consul L. Cassius had been killed and his army sent under the yoke by the Helvetii, he did not think he should yield” (1.7.4). That *memoria*, we will learn, is not only Caesar’s, but also belongs to *patres nostri*; conversely, the avenging of Cassius’ death and his army’s humiliation is not only a public act but one that punishes Caesar’s private injuries (1.12.3–7):

Caesar killed a great portion of them; the rest fled and hid in the nearest forests. This *pagus* is called **Tigurinus**; for the whole **Helvetian state** is divided into four *pagi*. This one *pagus*, after leaving its homeland, in the memory of our fathers (*patrum nostrorum memoria*) had **killed** the consul L. **Cassius** and sent his army under the yoke. Thus, whether by chance or the plan of the immortal gods, *the part* of the **Helvetian state** that had inflicted a famous disaster on the Roman people was the first to pay the penalty. And in this matter Caesar avenged *not only* public wrongs, *but also* his private ones, since the **Tigurini** had **killed** his father-in-law L. **Piso**’s grandfather, the legate L. **Piso**, *in the same battle with Cassius*.

The underscored sentence makes an explicit ring with Caesar’s own *memoria* of this same event (1.7.4, quoted above), marking the episode off as a textual unity with strong links to a past event. The post-battle wrap-up, normally devoted to casualty figures (e.g. 1.53.2–4, 7.28.5), here instead reverts to the past: the significant Roman dead are those killed, not in 58 BC, but in 107, Piso’s grandfather and the consul Cassius. The repetitions punctuating the paragraph (boldface), the prominent use of correlatives (italics), the precision of Piso’s naming, the double evocation of historical precedent, and an extremely rare mention of the gods (Fantham, chapter 11, pp. 142–3) highlight this firm statement of Caesar’s right to act for the Roman people, whose historically validated interests work in tandem with his own. Named multiple times in every book, but most often by far in *BG* 1, the *populus Romanus* is the backdrop against which this action is played. Rome, too, is the end to which it all tends. So we read at 7.90.8 (the last sentence): “when the events of his year became known *at Rome*, a 20-day thanksgiving was decreed in return.”

### *The generals*

Caesar gave his cognomen to two millennia of autocrats; his personal image may be unique in its projection of solitary genius. But his self-presentation in the *BG* is of a commander who works within the system. I have discussed his use of the third person and his relationship with his troops above; this section will consider other aspects of Caesar the character (“Caesar”).

Perhaps the first thing to notice about “Caesar” is that he is not the first person we meet in the *BG*. That honor is reserved for Orgetorix, whose story (1.2.1–4.4) serves as a prequel not only for the narrative as a whole but most particularly for Vercingetorix, Caesar’s most formidable enemy, whom we will not meet until the last

*commentarius* (cf. the ring structure 1.7.1 ~ 7.6.1). “Caesar” responds (1.7.1). He enters the narrative not in the nominative but in the dative case, in answer to a request for help against encroaching enemies. That sets a pattern for his behavior throughout most of the story, and has presented his contemporaries (and later scholars) with the nice question of how much his war-making in Gallia – and beyond – was a response to real threats, and how much was imperialistic in intent from the start (Ramsey, chapter 4, and Rosenstein, chapter 7 in this volume). As it progresses, the *BG* spins an ever-growing web of *pax Romana*: defense of an ally creates new territory taken from the enemy; that territory is in turn threatened – and the *imperium* goes on. In this sense, the message sent by the *BG* is fully in step with expected Roman performance. “The central aspect of Roman strategy was image,” especially the inspiring of deterrent fear and the real possibility of vengeance, and the maintenance of dignity (*laus*) and effectiveness (*utilitas*) (Mattern 1999: 81–122, quotation from 122).

Being responsive to the needs of allies makes “Caesar” a good proconsul; winning battles against frightening foes and being able to speak persuasively to allies, soldiers, and enemy leaders alike show that he is good both at fighting and at speaking, the two primary virtues of a hero since the *Iliad*. The carefully constructed opening books bring “Caesar” gradually into the thick of things in a crescendo of action that puts all his virtues on show (see especially Schadee 2008b: 161–5). First to face him, the Helvetii are presented in the initial geo-ethnography as “outdoing the rest of the Gauls in *virtus*” because they fight almost daily battles with the Germans. Their story, from Orgetorix to the decisive battle at the Arar, is a microcosm of the narrative to come. Once they have been defeated – first in part (1.12–13), then in whole (1.24–9) – the Romans encounter the Germans themselves, rumors of whom terrify even the most experienced soldiers (1.39.1). At the beginning of *BG* 2, the next foes “Caesar” meets are the Belgae, introduced as *fortissimi* of all the Gauls because farthest from the Provincia (1.1.3). Thus the text in quick succession pits “Caesar” against the strongest of all the northern barbarians. On the way, he negotiates (1.7, 2.4–5), unmasks conspiracy (1.17–20), calms and exhorts his troops (1.40), and faces off rhetorically with the Helvetii (1.13–14) and with the fearsome Ariovistus (43–5). This testing in words and deeds establishes “Caesar” as exemplary in both *virtus* and responsive intelligence.

Both of those qualities are fully in evidence as “Caesar” moves to the natural extremities of *Gallia*, where lie huge rivers and mysterious seas. Topography plays various roles in this text. To begin with, in a way familiar from Herodotus on, its description, especially its names, validates the historian’s authority, using “the linear progression of troops criss-crossing the landscape to map out a geographic space whose . . . purpose is to convince us of the narrative’s . . . accuracy” (Cobley 1993: 45). Space itself can be presented as a synthetic vision of the whole of a region, as in the opening paragraph (“geographic space”), as a network of lines along which “Caesar” and the army move – the course of a march (“strategic space”) – and, in the setting for a battle alongside a mountain, marsh, or forest, as a precisely represented, three-dimensional space with boundaries and relief (“tactical space”: Rambaud 1974). Each kind of space presents particular difficulties, all of which are

met by “Caesar’s” forethought; here, as in every area of the *BG*, “Roman rationality prevails” (Hall 1998: 22).

This is an understated text: no Alps to break down with Herculean efforts, no quicksand-like mud to drown men in, no epic-scale storms to grapple with. Each of these motifs features in surviving Roman historiography; my examples come from, respectively, Livy 21.34–7, Tac. *Ann.* 1.63–5, and *ibid.* 2.23–4. Though each performs a complex variety of functions, at bottom is, perhaps, their important role in affirming the grand style of historical narrative and characterizing its participants accordingly. Ever expedient, Caesar prefers to sketch in the possibility of such scenes. Lists of towns and tribes suggest epic catalogue (e.g. 7.4.6), but precise terrain, and the troop movements thereon, are extensively simplified (Pelling 1981). Mountains, forest swamps, and bodies of water are natural defensive boundaries that articulate and enhance the topography of Caesarian battle and march; they also become backdrops against which to display the bravery, strength, and endurance of general and men alike. The Cevennes mountains provide a chance to surprise the enemy with a heroic show of speed (p. 161 above); marshes (*paludes*) repeatedly threaten deployment and lives (e.g. 7.19); deep forests threaten winter camps (5); the crossing of a vast river astounds the local inhabitants (1.13.1–2); and the expedition to Britain founders after a storm that destroys the boats, leaving the Romans exposed on the beaches were it not for Caesarian ingenuity (5.10.2). Above all, the deeds done here and the *virtus* demonstrated are remembered by this text; Caesarian written space “takes on a memorial function” (Lendon 1999: 315).

Throughout this Gallic space, we see “Caesar” in the distance and in close-up, as it were (for the cinematic metaphor, see Lendon 1999: 317). His speed, strategic knowledge, and endurance show him to be an “ideal general.” His praiseworthy skills are seen also in vignette: energy, military knowledge, and competence in his famous gerundive-laden administrative *aristeia* at the battle *ad Sabim* (2.20); care for his soldiers in his several speeches before and after battles (especially 5.52); management of his troops’ emotions (especially fear: Lendon 1999); strategic ability in his deployment of troops and, most eventfully, of himself (“Caesar” in color: 7.88.1). One key attribute of the ideal general is his ability to awe by merely appearing on the scene; the intensity of “Caesar’s” presence is demonstrated even in his absence, when Labienus can conjure him up *in absentia* to act as judge and as exhortation to the soldiers fighting on the Seine (7.62.2).

But a key element of Caesar’s self-presentation in the *BG* is that he is not, in fact, alone. Two other leaders share his stage: the German Ariovistus (*BG* 1) and the Arvernian Vercingetorix (*BG* 7). We see less of Ariovistus; but his big meeting with “Caesar” is instrumental both in introducing Caesar’s use of significant landscape and in giving voice to barbarian *libertas* (Griffin 2008). It seems as if the colloquy will be evenly balanced between the Roman and the German commanders: they meet in a central space equidistant from each camp and from their escorts, who are themselves matched in number and rank – though “Caesar” has to provide his infantry with cavalry props in order to maintain the balance (1.42.4–6). Despite this preparation, however, their speeches are not balanced: Ariovistus’ is by far the longer (“Caesar” is summarized: 1.45) and the arguments he makes are precisely those, one imagines,

that Caesar himself would make were he in the same position. Ariovistus, then, can match, even outdo, “Caesar” in speaking (Christ 1974); unfortunately, despite the advance billing, he and his Germans are not a match for the Romans in fighting. His escape, in a little boat (1.53.3 *navicula*), has an element of the miraculous about it, presaging Jugurtha’s solo escape from the killing fields at Sall. *BJ* 101.9. It miniaturizes this great German, whose death Caesar ignores: his unnarrated demise is, by 5.29.3, a past matter of “great grief” to the Germans alone.

Vercingetorix has a more elaborated history. He is, indeed, the best-defined of all the Gallo-Germanic characters, “the most Caesarian of all Caesar’s antagonists” (Adcock 1956: 54). Unlike Ariovistus, he is definitely a military match for “Caesar” – a match that is brought out spatially in the first half of *BG* 7, as the two generals track each other along first the Loire, then the Allier (for the campaigns see Wiseman 1994: 408–12). He has “Caesar’s” ability to speak persuasively (7.4, 7.20), and his speed (7.4.6, 29.5, 64.1), and is nearly his equal in commanding loyalty (7.30.1). He receives similar narrative treatment, as well: the wide sweep and the close-up vignette, especially with his army (7.20–21.1). Among other things, this parallelism with “Caesar” establishes the climax of the narrative, with the worst opponent positioned, and elaborated, last: in a familiar move, Caesar raises the enemy to the level of the Romans, enhancing his victory. That victory, like those in 57 and 55, was celebrated with a thanksgiving of unprecedented length (cf. 2.35.4, the last words of the book: *quod ante id tempus accidit nulli*). It effectively caps Caesar’s portrayal of this war as one that, above all, brought the Roman people where no Roman had gone before.

### *The work of war*

Ancient military narrative, both poetry and prose, had well-established conventions of image (the gleam of weapons, the piles of corpses), character (the loyal sidekick, the gifted opponent), and scene (the flight of frightened rustics, the *cobortatio*, non-combatants on the walls). Caesar’s narratives repeatedly appeal, through their privileging of information gathered through first-hand knowledge, to the autoptic authority of the historian/commentator (cf. 1.22.4, a scout “had reported as seen something he had not seen”). Yet, as is well known, Caesar describes with a wealth of circumstantial detail events he did not see (e.g. the battles in *BG* 5) and those he could not possibly have seen (e.g. the council inside Alesia in 7). It is easy to posit – though this still does not account for the precision of detail – that in those cases he was working from notes given him by his legates, or from information garnered later (cf. *BC* 3.57). Recent analyses, however, show that, like his portrayal of character (above), his often precise descriptions of military activities are shaped also by the literary conventions of war narrative, which tends toward type scenes. Since these are drawn from Roman readers’ narrative experience, Caesar can vary his treatment of a given type without significantly compromising the narrative’s impact. He can prune a march plus attack, for example, down to a single sentence: so 4.4.6 “having finished this whole march with the cavalry in a single night they overwhelmed the Menapii.” Or, he can give it a more leisurely treatment (5.28, the march to the Thames and

defeat of Cassivellaunus), even a full-blown narrative with speeches, as he does at 7.57–62, describing Labienus' march to and battle near the Seine. Again, the literary technique tends to distort the real action on the field; but it serves the wider purpose of presenting that confusion in patterns which allow readers to understand and interpret the represented experience. In what follows I briefly consider the siege and capture of cities, the pitched battle, and the engineering *opus*.

The *urbs capta* is familiar both from epic and from rhetorical theory: it is one of Quintilian's primary examples of an embellished description that can make an orator's speech emotionally persuasive. His account claims, moreover, that even the single word *eversio* can summon up in imagination a picture of the details attendant in literary descriptions of the event. Like other narrative elements, sieges and city-captures in the *BG* run the gamut from a one-word mention (1.5.4) to a brief narrative (2.12.2) to a full-scale description, as in the sieges of Gergovia and Alesia.

Quintilian identifies a package of elements found in the typical *urbs capta* description, including flames running through homes and temples, the crash of falling buildings, a sound made up of many shouts, people embracing their loved ones, the wailing of women and children, looting and pillaging, bound prisoners, and mothers defending their children (8.1.68–9). At Gergovia, for example, Caesar includes the shouting (7.47.4), women and children begging for mercy (7.47.5), the plundering enemy (7.47.7), mothers holding their children (7.48.3). The narrative is not, ultimately, pathetic (because these are Gauls, not Romans?), but the *urbs capt(anda)* scene is unmistakable.

Once again, the literary convention need not mean that the description is fiction: sieges are formulaic by nature, and their descriptions will be so as well (Roth 2006). But that Caesar deploys such scenes for more than purposes either of “simply” recording what happened or of “propaganda” is manifest from his inclusion of not one but two sieges in which the Romans are effectively beaten: the Gallic massacre of Sabinus and Cotta in Book 5, and the Roman attack on Gergovia, an extensively narrated siege from which “Caesar” has to withdraw, being driven almost to defeat by his own troops' disobedience. Both are elaborated beyond what is even probable, and include details of the characters' feelings that would have been inaccessible to Caesar. And though one can read these stories in ways that show “Caesar” to advantage (e.g., Rambaud 1966: 220–1), he was under no obligation even to include them (Pelling 1981: 741–2). Literarily, however, these episodes build tension and suspense; show the Romans, as represented by their commanders and centurions, at their most stubborn and strong-willed; and contribute to the overall structure of the grand narrative's trajectory from victory to defeat and back to victory. All of these effects are economically illuminated by the delay that a siege necessarily introduces into a narrative. Further, the static setting of a besieged camp or town offers a place to stage significant events, from a *teichoskopia* to a fight before the gates, from the pathetic display of non-combatants to the *virtus* of Romans and enemy alike.

Pitched battles offer less chance for spatial concentration. The action can range over a potentially vast area, especially if one includes the pursuit of the routed, and can incorporate large spatial features, especially rivers and forests. That potential spread is typically played off against snapshots of individual action, such as a

commander's *aristeia*. Despite its multiplicity of parts and capacity to cover terrain, however, a battle “must obey the dramatic unities of time, place, and action” (Keegan 1991 [1976]: 16). Caesar achieves this by wrapping a battle narrative around a central, “Homeric” hero – usually “Caesar” – who focuses the action and imposes control on it (R. D. Brown 1999: 339). He can exploit the dramatic device of a *peripeteia* (e.g. 1.52, 5.48); or he may track separate contingents until they turn and, by constituting a physical center of action, bring the narrative to a climax (e.g. 6.34–40).

The last element to discuss here is Caesar's war works: the descriptions of war engines, walls, camps, and bridges that punctuate the narrative. They are remarkable for their detail and frequency – no other Latin historian includes so many. The wealth and precision of detail in the descriptions has led many to try to reconstruct the objects. The bridge over the Rhine (4.17) has been the most popular, with simulations and actual reconstructions ongoing: I single out here the BBC program, “Secrets of the Ancients,” which in November 1999 tried, and failed, to reproduce Caesar's feat. But attempts even to draw structures such as the tower at Massilia (BC 2.9) or the Gallic wall (7.23) have met with mixed results (Holmes 1911: 711–24, 746–8). One specialized study concludes: “there is substantial evidence that throughout the *Commentaries* the sections on engineering are not accurate and complete descriptions of the structures” (Dodington 1980: 5). As objects in the narrative, however, these *opera* serve a variety of functions. In one remarkable passage, describing the fieldworks at Alesia, Caesar employs bits of the *sermo castrensis*, explaining for his non-soldierly audience the names of his defensive structures (7.73). Like the occasional moments in Homer where we hear the language of the gods (e.g. *Il.* 14.291), these instances of “soldier talk” emphasize our separation from the world of the *BG* at the moment of connecting us closer to it. The other *opera*, too, offer tantalizing glimpses of physical objectivity that turn out, on closer inspection, to be less useful as mimetic descriptions than they at first appear. But they do a tremendous job of representing physically the superiority of the Romans. In addition, like centerpieces, their ecphrastic detail highlights the writer's *ars* (Scarola 1987). They raise questions of narrative and historiographical authority (Kraus 2007). Finally, like other triumphal narratives (cf. Plin. *Ep.* 8.4 on the *bellum Dacicum*), they offer future writers material for panegyric.

## FURTHER READING

The best commentary on the whole of the *BG* remains Kraner, Dittenberger, and Meusel 1960; Holmes 1911 has extensive treatment of the war narratives and technical points. Hammond 1996 is an excellent translation with helpful introduction and notes. Recent work on the *BG*, especially in dissertations not yet published, has stretched the boundaries of Caesarian study, and deserves close attention: I single out here Jervis 2001, on the representation of barbarians, with Williams 2001 and Woolf 1998 on Romanization, Barlow 1998 on noble Gauls, and Krebs 2006 on the German ethnography; Erickson 2002 explores Caesar's creative use of ethnography. Melchior 2004 is a fine treatment of Caesar's battle descriptions and the

representation of wounds; on his battles see especially R. D. Brown 1999 and 2004; for the ideal general see Woodman 1977: 284 (index) and Goldsworthy 1998; for Caesar's speed see Stadter 1993, and for his use of *exploratores* Ezov 1996. Finally, Nousek 2004 examines the *BG* as crafted literary response to Cicero's *De oratore*; see also the excellent, detailed treatments of aspects of Caesar's style and language in Spilman 1932, Eden 1962, Rasmussen 1963, Hall 1998, and Oldsjö 2001. Riggsby 2006 is the most thoughtful recent treatment on the nature of the narrative voice. Pelling 2006 (and elsewhere) discusses Caesar's boundary-leaping nature, Henderson 1996 his expedience, and Batstone and Damon 2006 his literary formation of character (concentrating on the *BC*, but relevant for both histories). Specialized treatments of dramatic structures (Rowe 1967), epic conventions (Miniconi 1951) and their role in historiography (Keitel 1987, Rossi 2003), the *urbs capta* (Paul 1982), and *sermo castrensis* (Mosci Sassi 1983) are helpful. On broader issues of genre see Barchiesi 2001 and, on historiography in particular, Marincola 2007; for the Roman concept of conquered space see Nicolet 1991; and for exemplarity in Roman thought see Chaplin 2000 and Roller 2004.

## NOTE

- 1 Unsurprisingly, most of the preservation of the *BG* is owed to French copyists – a French interest in the history of Gaul that continues (V. Brown 1979: 106). For the reception of the *BG* in France, see Wyke 2007: 41–65, 261–3.